SPAWN
THE DARK AGES
11
DIGITAL EDITION
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Todd McFarlane & Image Comics Present

A Child's Crusade Part II

The Ghost On The Hill

Dedicated to Cody and Cole

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SPAWN created by Todd McFarlane

EDITORIAL NOTE: In last month's issue, we failed to credit Mark Nicholas for the fine job he did in coloring Liam's artwork. Our apologies to Mark.

SPAWN DARK AGES 10 SUMMARY:

A merchant ship weathers a terrible storm and sinks. The ship's misfortune is blamed on Covenant, one of its passengers. Years later, twelve year old Maeve is playing near a stream when the water turns red. She finds that all her town's men have been slaughtered. Seeing the carnage, a voice tells her to avenge the men's deaths. She assembles an army of children, and must find the man who will champion her cause. Her search leads her to Spawn, shackled in a cave. Maeve tells him God will trade his help for forgiveness. But when Spawn sees the army he has been asked to lead, he is incredulous.

SPAWN: The Dark Ages #11 January 2000. Digital Edition. June 2013. Published by IMAGE COMICS, 2001 Center Street, Berkeley, CA 94704.

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Winter is a season of forgetfulness.
When nature hides her secrets beneath a mantle of virgin white. When the world waits to be reborn.
But this world holds other secrets. Older, long forgotten truths. Primal energies from days before the hand of Christendom extended to this little island.
They are sleeping, deep in the very roots of the world.
I will awaken them.

In depthless slumbers they wait, to be reborn. Powers governed by neither heaven above nor hell below.
I will awaken them.
No matter the cost.
No matter the sacrifice.
I will awaken them and they will make me free again.

Watch me closely...
Heeeaaah!

Foot planted. Weight on the forward leg. Strike through the target.
And watch your bloody head!
Now, who wants to try?
They are but children. A handful of runaways, led on a mad quest by a strange, beguiling girl.
Somehow, through some twist of fate, it has fallen upon him to make soldiers of them.

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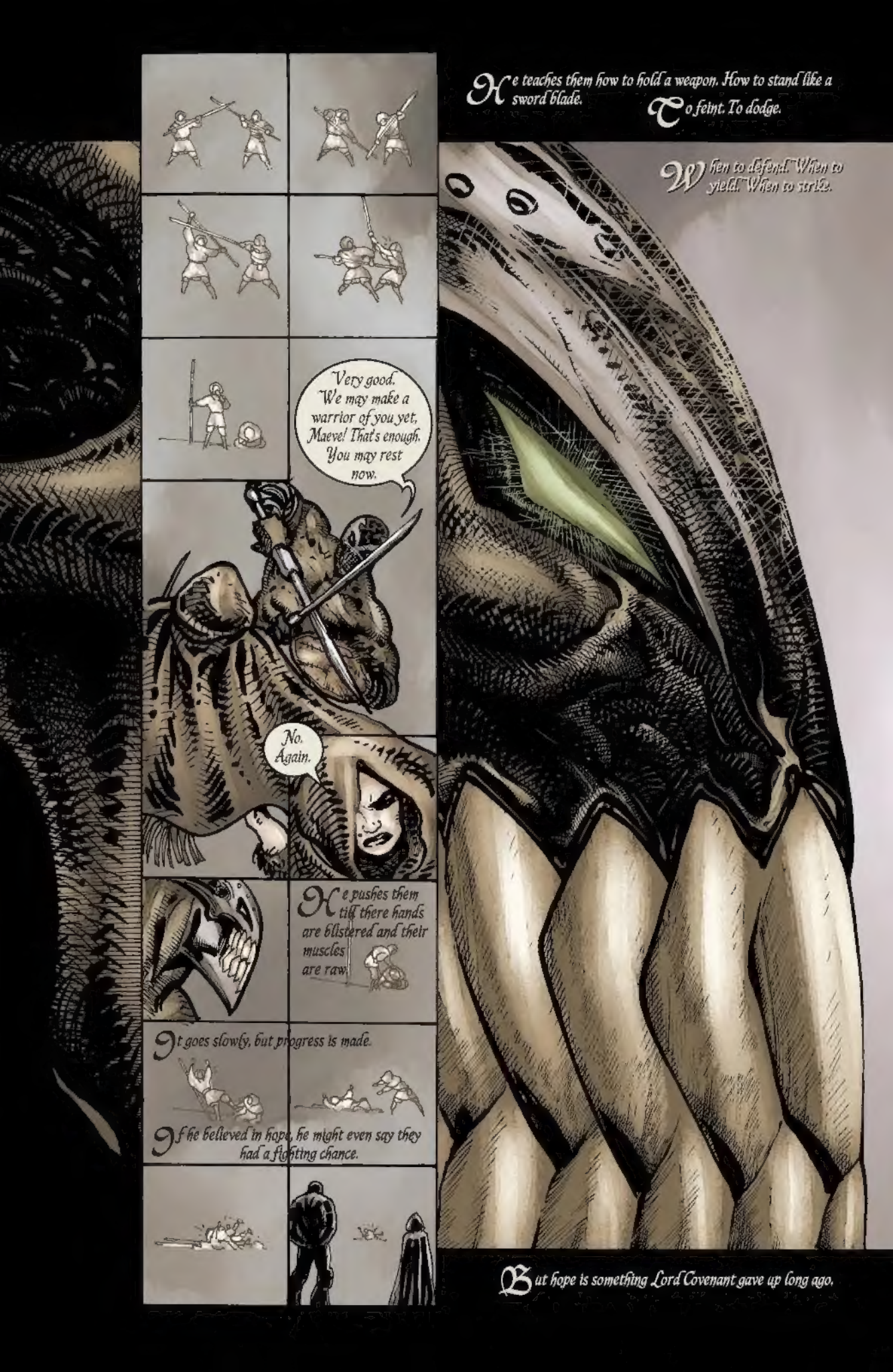
He teaches them how to hold a weapon. How to stand like a sword blade.
To feint. To dodge.
When to defend. When to yield. When to strike.
"Very good. We may make a warrior of you yet, Maeve! That's enough. You may rest now.
No. Again.
He pushes them till there hands are blistered and their muscles are raw.
It goes slowly, but progress is made.
If he believed in hope, he might even say they had a fighting chance.
But hope is something Lord Covenant gave up long ago.

Did you see me? I fight like a lion
You roar like lion. You fight like a lamb.
Lord Covenant said I was --
Ach! My arms are burning.
-- Covenant frightens me.
Stronger than Samson, just watch --.
I as well. 'E is a thing against nature, 'at's wot 'e is. 'E's not one of us.
Stop it! Lord Covenant is one of us. In many ways, he is the best of us, though he does not know it.
He deserves our respect and our thanks.

Away from the campfires and the eager gossip of children, Lord Covenant stalks the forest perimeter.
There's something out here. He can sense spying eyes peering at him from the darkness.
Broken twigs, the tracks of a lone rider. The snowfall has not yet covered them.
A heavy man, most probably armored, on a large steed.
Someone was here, just moments ago.
But who?
And why?
The answers will have to wait.

Back at camp.
So, my lord, are we the pride of England yet?
It's madness, dear child. Surely you see that. Like trying to teach cats to dance.
This is a fool's errand, Maeve. I don't know why we pursue it.
You speak of a great evil, but you cannot tell me what it is, or why we must fight it.
If there is a threat, why doesn't the King put an end to it?
The King is in worse shape then us. The Lionheart is dead and his brother John is a weak successor. He is beleaguered by a stubborn mother and a more stubborn France.
He is not equal to the task.
You speak like a courtier, not a country girl. How do you know such things?
When I close my eyes, see things. I see visions.

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These visions tell me of a great wickedness, a power beyond the ken of both heaven and hell.
Things my own dull mind could never imagine. Armies of the dead spat forth from a great cauldron, rivers of blood to feed the base appetites of old gods.
Pagan fiends that seek to wipe the godly from the face of this land.
This is what I see when I close my eyes. This is what shall come to pass unless I stop it. Unless we stop it.
I cannot say why this is so, only that it is so
I can give you no other reason to believe, but that I speak the truth.

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In the days and weeks that follow, they do improve.
With the eagerness of the young, they master the simpler techniques of combat.
Their reputation grows. Stories of the Children's Army spreads across the countryside. Everyday, more and more children come to join.
Soon, it is indeed an impressive group that follows the Hellspawn and the maiden Maeve.
Impressive enough to be noticed.

An envoy approaches.
Ho! We seek the witch child called Maeve. You are charged with bewitching the children of the shire and luring them away.
Present your leader and no harm shall come to you. You may return to your mothers. The witch girl is to be charged for her crimes.
I am a the leader. You speak to me if you must speak at all.
I am Maeve, and I am no witch. Now let us pass.

Ye had yer chance! Now pay for yer heresy!
Men, take the girl. Kill anyone who tries to stop you
May God have mercy on your soul.
Hah!

Spawn watches the children, expecting them to turn and run. But they stand and fight. They are braver than he thought.

The company of knights is overwhelmed by the chudren's ranks. The Hellspawn makes quick work of those who stand against him
Enough. Stop this madness and leave us. There shall be no more death this day
This is not over. You shall pay for your witchery!
Three knights killed, one beheaded.
Five others wounded. They are eager to make their escape

The children are alive with excitement. It is like some fantastic game of soldiers.
Spirits high, they cheer and laugh. It has been a glorious baptism of battle.
Enough! Put away your weapons. We are not savage marauders.
Come, let us count noses.
But victory is not entirely one-sided.

No!! He's gone! Our poor Georgie is Gone!! Why didn't you save him?
I--I didn't think we were going to die.

That evening
What have we done? What will become of us?
They've lost their innocence, Maeve. That is a heavy loss for a child. This isn't rings and roses any more. They have tasted death -- real death -- and that is not easily washed away.
This is no game for children and they have learned that today. I doubt if there be more than a dozen still left by the morrow.
I fear you may be right

I got it! I got it!
Uff!
No you don't!
Jack! Over here! I'm in the open!

Stop!
Come back here! Who are you?

Maeve barely sleeps that night. The weight of circumstance hangs heavy on her young brow.
Her life before, her life as a simple country girl, seems like a distant echo now, a reflection in a murky pool.
She is weeping when the gray light of dawn paints the sky...
Milady? I don't mean to intrude but I think you should see this.
It can't be.

God bless us.
More children, three score at least, have gathered to her side. She will never doubt her cause again.
Well, I'll be damned.

The legends tell of the coming of a child. Perhaps in this age, perhaps a thousand years from now.
Could she be the one? Could this common brat be the one?
I have my doubts. But no matter. She won't stand in my way. Nor will her thrice damned lap dog. I won't allow it.
There are powers in this world which shall make me free.
They are sleeping, deep in the very roots of this world. I shall awaken them.
No matter the cost.
No matter the sacrifice.

DARKNESS

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